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Mr. Jean Comtois,  
Ministry of Education,  
4th fl-1580 Merivale Rd.,  
Nepean,  
Ontario.

April 14, 1989

Dear Mr Comtois,

Thank you very much for meeting yesterday on issues relating to students with environmental sensitivities. It was very satisfying to meet with someone so able to grasp the concerns of parents with environmentally sensitive children.

Although many educators have expressed concern and committed themselves to increasing awareness and developing policy, there's still a fair ways to go before practices abusive of children with this problem are brought under control.

Problematic practices commonly identified by parents include:

- painting during the school year,
- pesticides and herbicides,
- cleaning products,
- heating and ventilation effects,
- water supply,
- furniture, and construction material outgassing,
- appropriate flooring materials,
- archaic approaches to nutritional and pollution awareness,
  - as they relate to children's health problems,
- teaching materials and the environmentally sensitive child,
- photocopying, chemical, shop equipment considerations,
- point sources of pollution, such as dry cleaning residues,
  - perfumed personal products,
- special diet considerations in cafeterias,
- teachers feeding students, or giving food or candy rewards,
- dust, mold, and other inhalant problems.

As important as the removal of offending physical agents is a perceived problem of attitude in some educators. Over and over I have heard individual parents relate a repeated pattern. At first the concern doesn't register with school officials. Then

officials may question the existence or relevance of the concern. A third stage is that the credentials of the attending physician may be questioned.

Once parents finally get the school officials to acknowledge the concern (a process that has taken several years in some cases) the authorities may say there is "nothing they can do". After that stage, they may commit to doing things they never carry out. If, at this stage, the parents suggest that the school officials are not acting in good faith, the officials respond with claims which fly in the face of reality, such as "We are aware of these problems; we've done a lot; we care deeply about these children;" and then sigh in exasperation as if the parents' desire to achieve reasonable accommodation for the child were unreasonable, rather than the abuse.

Although I have been amazed at what appears to be downright irresponsibility on the part of Carleton Board officials, I believe the appropriate way to proceed is to try further efforts to develop a co-operative attitude where they learn that helping students with this sometimes extremely serious problem is coincident with their own goals of providing the best possible service to their clients and to taxpayers.

I hope that sometime in the near future the Ministry of Education can help, in some co-operative way, all school boards in Eastern Ontario to begin making serious efforts to provide reasonable accommodation for children (and staff) with this disability. I leave it with you, for now, to think of some way this might be accomplished, although I did like the idea you mentioned, of area-wide workshops for board officials.

Is there some likelihood such workshops would be achievable in the near future?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CB' or 'Chris Brown', written in a cursive style.

Chris Brown  
(613) 837 7173

cc. Lyle MacLennan, C.B.E.